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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#)

SUBJECT: MUNIB AL-MASRI TOUTED AS POTENTIAL PM IN NATIONAL
UNITY GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Amid speculation that Fatah and Hamas are nearing consensus on the prisoners' initiative, and possibly agreement on a National Unity Government (NUG), Fatah and private sector sources have suggested that prominent Nablus businessman, Munib al-Masri, is a potential candidate for the post of Prime Minister. Al-Masri is actively campaigning for the job. This cable offers biographic background on al-Masri. End summary.

A Self-Made Man

¶2. (SBU) Born in Nablus in 1934, al-Masri received his early education in Nablus at al-Najah High School, while pursuing his higher education in Texas. He graduated with honors in 1955 from the University of Texas with a degree in Petroleum Geology and in 1956 he received a Masters degree in Geology and Government from Sul Ross State University in Texas.

¶3. (SBU) He went on to join Phillips Petroleum as a geologist. At the same time, Phillips Petroleum allowed him to establish the Engineering and Geological Services Office, the precursor to the EDGO Group, of which he is still the chairman and CEO. EDGO has developed into an international conglomerate with operations in 20 countries involved in contracting and joint ventures and as a supplier/distributor of engineering equipment and materials. In one interview, al-Masri described the company as specializing in the oil, gas, power, and water industries.

¶4. (C) After his initial stint with Phillips Petroleum in Jordan, he went on to manage their office in Algeria during Algeria's struggle for independence. He then took a leave of absence to join the Jordanian government as a special consultant supervising the execution of major public projects in Jordan. Afterwards, he returned to Phillips to become the company head in Beirut, overseeing operations in 16 countries. At the same time, the EDGO Group pursued lucrative projects in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Other sources close to al-Masri, have said that there were also a number of EDGO projects in Libya.

Enters Politics

¶5. (SBU) In 1970, he joined the Jordanian government of Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal as Minister of Public Works. During this period, he mediated between King Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat. He returned to Nablus in 1994 after the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of

Principles and founded the Palestinian Development and Investment Company (PADICO) in Nablus, the largest company in the West Bank and Gaza. He is still the company's Chairman. A political moderate, al-Masri was considered for the

position of PA Prime Minister in March 2003 -- a post that was eventually awarded to Mahmud Abbas. A political independent, al-Masri also serves in the structures of the PLO as a member of the PLO Central Council.

Significant Contributor
to Palestinian Charities

¶6. (SBU) Al-Masri is considered one of the world's wealthiest Palestinians and is well-known for his involvement in several economic and philanthropic Palestinian organizations. Al-Masri was instrumental in the establishment of the al-Quds University Investment Fund and is a member of the Board of Trustees of al-Quds University. In addition, he has served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah. Al-Masri is also affiliated with the Engineering and Technology College at al-Najah University in Nablus and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the American University in Beirut. During the second Intifadah, al-Masri created the Nablus Rehabilitation Committee, which aims to rebuild homes destroyed by the IDF. He is also a member of the World Bank's Council of Advisors for the Middle East and North Africa region.

Personal Information

¶7. (C) He has an American (other reports say British) spouse and six children. Though he built an Italian-style villa situated on Mount Gerizim overlooking Nablus (costing an estimated USD 3-4 million), he is reportedly known for his "stinginess." According to one February 2005 press report, al-Masri has undergone heart surgery, and has six stents in his heart.

WALLES